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Inductive Studies in the Acts.

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THE PRIMITIVE ERA OF CHRISTIANITY.

AS RECORDED IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

30-63 A. D.

SEC. 9. THE CONVERSION OF PAUL FROM JUDAISM TO CHRISTIANITY.

Acts 9 : 1-19a; cf. 22 : 6-16 and 26 : 13-18. 34 A. D. Damascus.

I. STUDY OF THE FACTS.

Let the following subclassification of the material in this section be verified, corrected, or improved :

- Par. 1. 9 : 1, 2, Persecution of the Damascus Christians.
- Par. 2. 9 : 3-9, The Revelation of Jesus to Paul.
- Par. 3. 9 : 10-19a, The Divine Commission through Ananias.

1. Prepare an abstract, in your own language, of the facts recorded in this section. Make it as well proportioned and as accurate as possible.

2. Of the incidents attending the conversion of Paul there are three distinct narratives: (1) Acts 9 : 3-19a ; (2) Acts 22 : 6-16 ; (3) Acts 26 : 12-18. To arrive at the exact facts, therefore, it is necessary to make a careful comparative study of all three accounts. This the student is expected to do, working out of all three the harmonized details of the events. Let the most important differences in the three narratives be noted and explained, and a decision be reached as to which account is most trustworthy.

II. TOPICS FOR INVESTIGATION.

1. *Paul's mission to Damascus.*--What is the connection between Acts 9 : 1 and 8 : 1-3? Observe the titles used in this chapter to

designate the Christians: "disciples" (vs. 1), those "of the way" (vs. 2), and "saints" (vs. 13); with the aid of a concordance look up other passages where these designations occur. Locate Damascus upon the map, and learn something about the city as it then was. How came there to be Christians in that city? Why was this persecution of the disciples carried as far as Damascus? Why did Paul secure letters from the high priest for this mission? What was the purport of them? What did the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem have to do with the synagogues in Damascus or elsewhere? Explain how the disciples were subject to legal persecution for their adherence to Christ. What was to be done with Christians found in Damascus?

2. *The revelation of Jesus to Paul.*—Observe and consider separately the incidents connected with the vision: *a*) vicinity of Damascus, *b*) midday, *c*) shekinah, *d*) in which Jesus appeared to Paul, *e*) stunning blindness, *f*) a voice from heaven, *g*) Jesus' question, "Saul, Saul," etc., *h*) Jesus' word, "It is hard," etc., *i*) Paul's reply, "Who art thou, Lord?" *j*) Jesus' answer, "I am," etc., *k*) Paul's second question, "What wilt," etc., *l*) command to go into the city and receive his commission, *m*) continued blindness, *n*) three days' fast. Why should the revelation to Paul have been attended by such striking circumstances? What was the need of the vision itself to Paul? Why did it come just at that time? Explain Jesus' words to Paul, "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad" (omitted by R. V. from 9:5; cf. 26:14). What did Paul mean by his question, "Who art thou, Lord?" What was the providential purpose of the blindness which came upon Paul? Why the long fast and waiting before he received his commission? What were Paul's spiritual experiences during this period? Consider whether Paul's vision of Jesus was internal or external, subjective or objective, physical or spiritual. Would either kind of vision have accomplished the purpose of the revelation? Compare Paul's vision of Jesus at this time with Jesus' resurrection appearances to the Twelve; were they parallel, and with similar aim?

3. *Paul's preparation for this crisis.*—Consider whether Paul had been providentially prepared for receiving this revelation of Jesus, *a*) by his natural temperament—humane, sincere, and loyal to religious truth; *b*) by his birth and education—a Hellenistic Jew, trained in the liberal school of Gamaliel, and associated with Hellenists; *c*) by his contact with Christian truth—in the Christian preaching, especially of Stephen, which, as a deep thinker and a mentally trained man, he would profoundly consider; *d*) by his contact with the Christians themselves—

witnessing their fine courage, joy, forgiveness, faith, traits nobler than his own religion produced ; *e*) by his own spiritual unrest—he had kept the law blamelessly but was not at peace (*cf.* Rom. 7) ; *f*) by his present inhuman inquisition—his religion had led him into brutal bloodshed and persecution, which he realized was ungodlike and wrong. He was therefore searching for the new light, especially as he meditated upon his course while he journeyed to Damascus.

4. *The conversion of Paul.*—What was Paul's moral and religious character previous to his vision of Jesus (*cf.* Phil. 3 : 6 ; Acts 23 : 1 ; 1 Tim. 1 : 13 ; Acts 26 : 9 ; Gal. 1 : 14 ; also John 16 : 2, 3) ? Was he completely devoted to the religion of his fathers ? Did he earnestly strive to attain perfection of character by obedience to the law ? Was he living up to the best religious light of his time before Christ came ? Why had not Paul become a Christian before this time ? Consider two meanings for the word "conversion : " *a*) a turning from sin to holiness, a change from wrong purpose to right purpose, a reversal of moral choice ; *b*) a change of ideas, a reversal of belief (and conduct incident thereto) consequent upon the gaining of new knowledge. In which of these two senses can we use the term "conversion" to designate this experience of Paul ? Why had he lacked before this the evidence which would convince him of the Messiahship of Jesus ? Did the gospel come to him as a divine relief from mistaken thoughts and mistaken deeds ? Was Paul slower in accepting Jesus and his teaching than were Jesus' immediate followers ?

5. *The divine commission.*—Compare the three different accounts of the substance and the giving of this commission (*cf.* 9 : 15–17 ; 22 : 14, 15 ; 26 : 16–18). Note and explain the important variations. Was the commission announced to him by Ananias ? If so, why was it announced in this way ? Consider the divine communications to both Paul and Ananias, in preparation for their meeting (*cf.* Acts 10 : 1–23). Was he by Ananias received into Christian brotherhood ? Consider that the Holy Spirit baptism was administered to Paul by a common disciple rather than by one of the apostles (*cf.* Acts 8 : 14–17). Why was Paul called and commissioned apart from the Twelve (*cf.* Gal. 1 : 16, 17) ? Was Paul's commission at the outset a distinct and exclusive appointment to the evangelization of the Gentiles, or did it only later come to be that by force of circumstances (*cf.* Acts 9 : 22–25 ; 22 : 17–21 ; Gal. 1 : 16 ; Rom. 11 : 13 ; Eph. 3 : 8 ; Rom. 15 : 16 ; Gal. 2 : 2, 7–9 ; 1 Tim. 2 : 7 ; 2 Tim. 1 : 11) ? How long after Paul's conversion before he began his work among the Gentiles ? What

peculiar qualifications had Paul for the Gentile mission? Why had no one of the original apostles taken up this work?

III. OBSERVATIONS AND TEACHINGS.

1. *Organization*.—Does the present section contribute any information on this subject?

2. *Environment*.—The persecution of the disciples was carried even to Damascus, where there seem to have been not a few of them.—Damascus was the gateway to the East, through which Christianity might pass to the Jews of the Dispersion in that region; hence Paul's mission to that city.—The Pharisee Paul, one of the ablest and most energetic opponents of Christianity, changed over to the Christian cause.

3. *Institutions*.—Paul received the spirit baptism at Ananias' hands, without the customary mediation of the apostles.

4. *Belief and teaching*.—Paul had had small opportunity to judge of the truth of Jesus' claims or his message; he lacked evidence to convince him of Jesus' Messiahship.—This evidence was providentially supplied to him by his vision of Jesus.—He immediately accepted the new light and entered upon the mission of giving it to others.—His conversion was not a change of heart and purpose, but of belief and action.

5. *Daily life*.—The revelation was attended by many striking circumstances which would impress Paul and his companions with its supernaturalness and significance.—In many natural and providential ways Paul had been prepared for the revelation of Jesus now given to him.—The agency of Ananias served to affiliate Paul with the Damascus Christians.

6. *Divine guidance*.—Paul was a chosen servant of God for the spread of the gospel, especially among the Gentiles.—The conversion of Paul was a most important step in the development of the universal and spiritual conception of the gospel.

Literature.—Upon this section see the commentaries on Acts, especially those of GLOAG, HACKETT, MEYER, and the CAMBRIDGE BIBLE. Also NEANDER, *Planting and Training of the Christian Church*, Vol. I, pp. 77-90; Vol. II, pp. 88-94; FARRAR, *Life and Work of St. Paul*, chs. 9 and 10; CONYBEARE AND HOWSON, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, ch. 3; WEIZSÄCKER, *Apostolic Age of the Christian Church*, Vol. I, pp. 79-93; HATCH, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th ed., article Paul; BIBLE DICTIONARY, article Paul; SCHAFF, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. I, pp. 281-316; STEVENS, *The Pauline Theology*, pp. 1-26; MATHESON, *Spiritual Development of St. Paul*, pp. 45-92; SABATIER, *The Apostle Paul*, pp. 47-67; STALKER, *Life of St. Paul*, ch. 2.

SEC. 10. PAUL'S EARLY CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY.

Acts 9 : 19b-31; *cf.* Gal. 1 : 17, 18 (19-24). 34-37 (37-43) A. D.

Damascus, Arabia, Jerusalem, Cilicia.

I. STUDY OF THE FACTS.

Let the following subclassification of the material in this section be verified, corrected, or improved :

Par. 1. 9 : 19b-22, Paul Preaches Jesus as Messiah at Damascus.

Par. 2. 9 : 23-25, His Forced Departure from the City.

Par. 3. 9 : 26-30, Paul's First Visit as a Christian to Jerusalem.

Par. 4. 9 : 31, Peace and Growth of the Christians.

1. Prepare an abstract of the material contained in this section, giving special attention to accuracy, and originality of language.

2. Observe Paul's own statements in Gal. 1 : 17, 18, concerning the events recorded in Acts at this point, gathering the additional facts given.

II. TOPICS FOR INVESTIGATION.

1. *Three years of work in Damascus.*—How came Paul to be in Damascus? How long after his conversion before he began preaching Christianity? In what places and to whom did Paul preach? What was his message (*cf.* vss. 20, 22)? How would he prove to Jews that Jesus was the Messiah? In view of his divine commission (*cf.* Sec. 9, Topic 5) why did he not preach to the Gentiles instead of to Jews? How long a time did Paul work in Damascus (*cf.* Gal. 1 : 17, 18)? Why does the Acts make no reference to the Arabian sojourn recorded in Gal. 1 : 17? At what point does the sojourn come in the Acts account—between vss. 19a and 19b, or between vss. 22 and 23? Consider the two views of this sojourn : *a*) that it was to Mt. Sinai, extending over a year or more of time, and was given to retirement and meditation ; *b*) that it did not take Paul far from Damascus, that it was of short duration, and that it was probably for escape from immediate danger to himself from his former associates on account of his joining the Christian cause (*cf.* Acts 9 : 29, and the discussions of Ramsay and Weizsäcker cited below). What success attended Paul's work in Damascus? How was it interrupted? What indications does Acts give as to the length of Paul's stay in Damascus (*cf.* vss. 19 and 23)? Why is this matter left so very indefinite by the historian? On his escape from the city (vs. 25) compare 2 Cor. 11 : 32, 33 (also Josh. 2 : 15 ; 1 Sam. 19 : 12).

2. *Paul's first Christian visit to Jerusalem.*—How long had Paul been away from the city (*cf.* Acts 9 : 1, 2 ; Gal. 1 : 18)? Why had he then left the city, and what had happened to his plans? For what purpose was he now returning to Jerusalem (*cf.* Gal. 1 : 18)? What did he wish to accomplish by this acquaintance with Peter: *a*) to establish friendly relations with him in spreading the gospel, *b*) to learn more about the facts of Christ's life and his detailed teachings? How was he received at Jerusalem, and why? Who intervened to set things right? How came Barnabas to know of, and vouch for, Paul's sincerity as a Christian? Whom of the apostles did Paul meet at Jerusalem (*cf.* Gal. 1 : 19), and why not the others also? What did he obtain from this conference? How long did he stay in Jerusalem (*cf.* Gal. 1 : 18)? Does Acts 9 : 28, 29 harmonize with the Galatians representation (1 : 18, 22-24), that Paul went to Jerusalem to visit Peter, stayed but fifteen days, "and was unknown by face to the churches of Judea"? To what class of Jews in Jerusalem did Paul undertake to preach the gospel? Why to them? Compare his experience in this respect with Stephen's (Acts 6 : 9, 10). What attitude did they take toward him, and why? How did he escape from them? With this explanation of his withdrawal from Jerusalem compare the one given by himself in Acts 22 : 17-21, to the effect that he received a directly communicated command from Christ and an immediate commission to the Gentile work. Can the two explanations be adjusted to one another?

3. *Paul's evangelizing activity in Syria and Cilicia.*—Indicate upon the map the route which Paul took in returning to Tarsus, his home. When do we next hear of him (*cf.* Acts 11 : 25, 26)? Where was Paul between his departure from Jerusalem in 37 A. D. and his call to Antioch in 43 A. D. (*cf.* Acts 9 : 30 ; Gal. 1 : 21)? Was he engaged during this period in preaching the gospel and establishing churches in Syria and Cilicia (*cf.* Acts 15 : 23, 41)? Was Paul in these years addressing himself to Jews chiefly, or to Gentiles—that is, had he yet entered upon his distinctively Gentile mission? In what particulars was this period one of preparation for his subsequent career? Why has so little been recorded about this important period of Paul's work? Consider that Syria and Cilicia formed the next territorial stage in the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.

4. *Condition of the Christians, 37-43 A. D.*—Explain the logical force and connection of the word "so" introducing Acts 9 : 31. Does it mean that Paul's departure from Jerusalem was the cause of the peace which the verse records; or that peace came because of Paul's

conversion to Christianity? Ascertain the political situation of these years, as to whether the attention of the Jews was directed away from the Christians to their Roman rulers in the disorders of the reign of Caligula and the early years of Claudius. Consider separately and carefully the three descriptive phrases used concerning the condition of the Christians: "being edified," "walking in the fear of the Lord," and "walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." Was it not only a period of rest, but also of growth in strength and numbers? Indicate upon the map the districts where Christianity existed at this time, and endeavor to associate with each district the time when the gospel came to it, the persons especially instrumental in establishing it there, and the character of the belief and the life of the Christians in each district. Where were the twelve apostles during this period? Were the local bodies of Christians organized; if so, in what way? Observe in this verse the term "church" used in a collective sense to denote all of the separate communities of the Christians taken as a whole; as a matter of historical fact, was the term yet used in this sense at this time, or is it a term which came into use later, and was then employed in speaking of the earlier time?

III. OBSERVATIONS AND TEACHINGS.

1. *Organization*.—Does the present section contribute any information upon this subject?

2. *Environment*.—Paul began immediately after his conversion an active, earnest preaching of Jesus as Messiah, to the Hellenistic Jews in Damascus, and later he attempted the same in Jerusalem.—Three years after his conversion he went to Jerusalem to visit Peter, intending thus to establish good relations with the original apostles in his preaching of the gospel, and to learn more of Jesus' life and teaching.—As far as the Acts account goes, there was as yet no presentation of the gospel directly to the Gentiles, independently of Judaism; even Paul was working exclusively among Jews.—The presence of severe political trouble, and the conversion of Paul the chief persecutor, caused the Jews for some years to remit their hostility to the Christians.—There were now Christians everywhere in Palestine, and the movement prospered greatly during this period of peace.

3. *Institutions*.—Does the present section contribute any information upon this subject?

4. *Belief and teaching*.—Paul's intellectual ability, his thorough education and training, his broad and deep knowledge of the Old

Testament, and his spiritual experience of Jesus, all combined to make him a most efficient preacher of the gospel.

5. *Daily life*.—The Christians everywhere were increasing in faith and piety, living worthily of their profession, and rejoicing in the gospel.

6. *Divine guidance*.—Paul became at once, upon his conversion, one of the most prominent advocates of Christianity.—Yet, contrary to what might have been supposed, it was God's plan that he should preach the gospel to Gentiles rather than to Jews, and his early years of Christian activity were spent in Syria and Cilicia.

Literature.—Upon this section see the commentaries on Acts, especially those of GLOAG, HACKETT, MEYER, and the CAMBRIDGE BIBLE. Also NEANDER, *Planting and Training of the Christian Church*, Vol. I, pp. 91-98; Vol. II, pp. 94-104; FARRAR, *Life and Work of St. Paul*, chs. 11 to 14; CONYBEARE AND HOWSON, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, ch. 3; RAMSAY, *St. Paul the Traveler*, pp. 380-382; WEIZSÄCKER, *Apostolic Age of the Christian Church*, Vol. I, pp. 94-98.

SEC. 11. PETER'S TOUR OF VISITATION AMONG THE CHRISTIANS OF PALESTINE.

Acts 9: 32-43. About 38-39 A. D. Circuit through Palestine.

I. STUDY OF THE FACTS.

Let the following subclassification of the material in this section be verified, corrected, or improved:

Par. 1. 9: 32-35, The Healing at Lydda and its Results.

Par. 2. 9: 36-43, The Miracle and the Ministry in Joppa.

Prepare a brief abstract of the material contained in this section.

II. TOPICS FOR INVESTIGATION.

1. *Peter's missionary activities*.—Recall what happened in 33 A. D. which spread the Christians through Palestine, and caused the formation of many Christian communities in a large number of places. What would be the duty of the apostles, as leaders in the gospel movement, toward these unnumbered local bodies of disciples? What was done in the case of the Christian converts in the city of Samaria (*cf.* Acts 8: 14-17)? Is it probable that similar interest was shown toward the Christians in other localities? Why should Peter in particular undertake to make a tour of visitation among these scattered groups of disciples? What could he do to help them? Were the apostles

perhaps frequently away from Jerusalem on such missions (*cf.* Gal. 1:18, 19)? When did Peter set out upon this tour? How long a time may we suppose it to have occupied? Can we at all trace the route which he took? Where do we find him at the close of the tour? How long did he remain at Joppa (*cf.* vs. 43)? How was this journey of Peter's like, and how different from, the missionary journeys by which Paul at a later time spread the gospel through Asia and Greece?

2. *The miracles at Lydda and Joppa.*—Indicate upon the map the location of Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa. How had Christianity been introduced into these places? Note the use in vss. 13, 32, and 41 of this chapter of the term "saints" to designate the disciples; was it a common designation, and what was the significance of it? Consider Peter's miracle-working as a part of his missionary activity. Was Æneas one of the Lydda Christians? Was palsy a common affliction among the Jews in the first century (*cf.* Matt. 4:24; 8:6; 9:2-6; Acts 8:7)? Compare with the healing of Æneas the somewhat similar cure performed by Jesus (Mark 2:1-12). Observe the words of Peter in invoking the cure (vs. 34). What was the result of the healing of Æneas upon the people of the village? What was the chief purpose of the miracle? How far from Lydda was Joppa? What is told about the character and life of Tabitha? Why is the Greek meaning of her name noted in the Acts? When did her death take place (vs. 37)? Why was Peter sent for—was it for the comfort and sympathy of his presence, or with the hope that he would restore her to life? Observe the indications of oriental funeral customs in vss. 37, 39. Why are the "widows" particularly mentioned (vss. 39, 41)? Why was not Jesus' name used in raising Tabitha as in the former cure (vs. 40; *cf.* vs. 34)? What was the purpose of this miracle? What was its effect upon the people of Joppa? Compare with this miracle of restoration the raising of Jairus' daughter by Jesus (Mark 5:22, 23, 38-42).

3. *Peter's preparation for his coming experience.*—In what ways would this extended tour among the Palestinian Christians prepare Peter for a larger and higher view of Christianity? In view of Jewish abhorrence of the tanner's trade, what does Peter's long stay with Simon the tanner (vs. 43) indicate as to his relation to Jewish ceremonialism? As a Galilean was he comparatively free from such scruples, although observing the essential restrictions regarding the clean and unclean? Was Peter, as compared with the other apostles, the one best fitted to comprehend and to carry forward the universal gospel as

taught by Christ and now to be retaught him by special revelation in Joppa and special illustration in Cæsarea?

III. OBSERVATIONS AND TEACHINGS.

1. *Organization*.—Peter made a missionary tour among the local bodies of disciples in Palestine, for the purpose of assisting them and directing them in their organization, internal Christian life, and evangelizing work.

2. *Environment*.—The inhabitants of Lydda and Joppa were in sympathy with the Christians and many converts were made by Peter's miracles among them.

3. *Institutions*.—Kneeling to pray seems to have been one of the customary religious forms among the primitive Christians.

4. *Belief and teaching*.—Jesus Christ was the source of the miraculous healing, and many were led to believe in him because of it.—Peter manifested in conduct and disposition a readiness to receive the divine revelation which was about to be given him.

5. *Daily life*.—Miracle-working was still a part of the apostolic activity and a means of large accessions to the gospel.—The Acts narrative leaves Paul at work in Cilicia while it turns to note the preparation of Peter for his experience with Cornelius.

6. *Divine guidance*.—The gospel was greatly advanced in Lydda and Joppa by God's manifest presence among them in the healing of Æneas and the restoration of Tabitha to life.—The saintly character and useful life of Tabitha were still more impressed upon all by her living again among them.

Literature.—Upon this section see the commentaries on Acts, especially those of GLOAG, HACKETT, MEYER, and the CAMBRIDGE BIBLE. Also BIBLE DICTIONARY, articles Æneas, Dorcas, Joppa, Lydda, Peter. Only the briefest mention of these incidents is made in other books than the commentaries.